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HINDERANCES TO THE SPREAD OF THE GOSPEL.

ISAIAH, lxxxv. 1, 2.—*For Zion's sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem's sake will I not rest, till the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof, as a lamp that burneth. And the gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory.*

Such was the love which the evangelical prophet felt for Jerusalem, and such his desire that its glory might be extended. It was a desire which gave him no rest, but prompted him to incessant labor and prayer for the accomplishment of its object. Desires similar to this have been felt, and similar efforts made by the faithful servants of God from age to age, for the propagation of the Christian religion. Since the commencement of the present century, the spread of Christianity has been a subject of growing interest. Good men have been excited, in an unusual degree, to unite their efforts and prayers for the enlargement of the church. The God of heaven has shown, by the promises of his word and the dispensations of his providence, that he regards this object with the highest favor, and that it is his most honorable purpose that the earth shall be filled with his glory. It would surely be reasonable to expect that the cause of Christianity, thus aided and supported, would soon prevail through the world; that the reign of righteousness and peace would speedily be extended from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same. And it becomes a subject of constant inquiry, why this is not the case. Why has not this blessed cause, which is eminently the cause of God, become universally triumphant? Why has not the inherent excellence of the Christian religion, united with the power of all holy beings in heaven and earth, brought the whole world to feel its influence and receive its blessings? No doubt this would long since have taken place, had there not been some mighty obstacles in the way, some opposing causes powerful enough to counteract the salutary tendencies of Christianity itself, and all the influence which has been exerted in its favor.

That the world is not converted to Christianity cannot be ascribed to the opposition of any one cause exclusively. In this, as in most other things, a

variety of causes are at work. The chief of these are found in all unsanctified men, consisting in their sinful affections and pursuits. These are referred to in the parable of the sower, as the great hinderances to the good effect of divine truth. The seed which fell on good ground sprang up and bare abundant fruit; while the fruitfulness of the other seed was prevented by the state of the ground, and other unpropitious circumstances. The hinderances referred to in the parable were the unholy dispositions of the human heart, together with those temptations and snares which beset unrenewed man, and which derive their influence chiefly from his moral corruption. Besides the general causes just mentioned, there are causes which are peculiar to particular classes of men; such as the superstition and ignorance of the Hindoos, and the power of caste among them; the intellectual and moral state of Jews, Mahometans, and Papists. By these and such like causes, the minds of men are closed and barred against the truth. Preaching the gospel to them in their present moral state generally proves like sowing seed upon the face of a rock, or upon the snows of winter. Other hinderances may be found in the hostile and persecuting power of civil governments; and others still, and perhaps the most difficult of all to be overcome, in the radically erroneous impressions made upon the minds of men in different parts of the heathen world, and even in countries blessed with the light of the gospel, by the flagrant errors and vices of nominal Christians. A greater obstacle to the spread of true Christianity can hardly be conceived, than the influence which the emissaries of the church of Rome have exercised by their attempts to make proselytes. To account fully for the little progress which has been made by Christians in their endeavors to evangelize the world, it would therefore be necessary to bring into view all the obstacles just alluded to;—obstacles so many and so great, that they have left but a small measure of success to the most faithful servants of Christ in any age.

But there is another class of hinderances to the spread of the gospel; I mean those which are found in *Christians themselves*. It is this class which I propose particularly to consider on the present occasion. The members of this Board, together with a large portion of the ministers and people of these United States, have been engaged for twenty years in sending the gospel to the unevangelized parts of the world. What we and our fellow-laborers have performed in this great work has not been in vain; and we are encouraged to go forward in our endeavors to spread the gospel through the earth. But still how small the measure of our success compared with our desires! How little has been done compared with what remains undone!

Remembering that I am never again, on such an occasion as this, to address my beloved brethren, the members of this Board, and other friends of missions now present, and confiding in your candor, I shall use an affectionate plainness of speech, endeavoring with sincerity of heart to promote that precious cause which, I trust, is the supreme object of our desires.

Our particular inquiry is, *What obstacles to the conversion of the world are found among those who, in different ways, are enlisted in the cause of Foreign Missions?*

The first obstacle I shall mention is, *the defect of our Christian character, or the want of a higher degree of holiness.*

In order to form a just estimate of our religious character we must examine ourselves by the standard of God's perfect law. And what is the fair result of such an examination? When, in the hour of retirement and soliloquy, we honestly compare our affections and lives with these divine precepts which require us to love God with all the heart, to love every human being as we

love ourselves, and to be holy as Christ is holy; what can we do but adopt the language of humble confession, and say, *If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?* Before him who searcheth the heart and knoweth all things, and in whose sight the heavens are not clean, we must, every one of us, be filled with shame and self-abhorrence, and penitently cry out,—*Behold! I am vile; what shall I answer?*

That this imperfection of our Christian character must prove a great hinderance to the success of the cause we are endeavoring to promote, appears from the *very nature* of that cause. It is the cause of *holiness*. And no one can be a fit instrument to promote such a cause, except in the degree in which he himself is holy. The proper agents to be employed in this work are men who walk in the Spirit; men dead to the world, and alive unto God. Without holiness, no right efforts for the enlargement of the church and the propagation of true religion through the world will ever be made. Without holiness, we are unfit to have any agency in this undertaking. The work of converting sinners and building up the church is a holy work, and should not be touched with unholy hands. We may be willing to employ our time and our worldly substance in the cause of missions, and to do this in the highest degree which can be justly demanded of us. Still if we contribute these external services *without love to God in our hearts*, how little shall we be likely to accomplish! The system of means necessary to the spread of the gospel is indeed partly *external and visible*; but it has also an *inward invisible* part, consisting in compassion to the souls of men, and in strong desires, and fervent unceasing prayers for their salvation. However important may be the outward means above mentioned; these inward operations of holiness, these benevolent desires and fervent prayers, which are visible only to the eye of God, are still more important. It is this *inward, invisible machinery* (if I may so call it), which gives efficiency to these external means. It is this spiritual, devout, fervent action of a purified heart, which exerts the most certain and powerful influence in promoting the salvation of men. Who can estimate the amount of good which twelve men, possessing the character of the twelve apostles, might accomplish at the present day?

Let it be remembered, brethren, that if we fall short of the proper degree of holiness, our success in the cause of missions will be essentially hindered. And though we may give a portion of our time and our substance to this cause; though we may stately meet to deliberate and act in behalf of the perishing millions of our race; yet those humble Christians who live in retirement, and who take no part in these more public transactions, may in reality stand higher than we do as instruments of good to the world. By their pure affections and fervent prayers in secret, they may do more for the advancement of Christ's kingdom than can be done by any outward means, unaccompanied by the spirit of holiness. The God who rules over all will so conduct the affairs of the church and the world, as to make it manifest that he is the immutable friend of holiness.

Secondly. If the mere want of a proper measure of holiness detracts from our success in spreading the gospel, this unhappy effect must result in a still higher degree from the *direct indulgence of affections which are selfish and earthly*.

Selfish, earthly affections aim at a selfish, earthly interest. But the spread of the gospel through the world is a benevolent and spiritual interest. These two interests are directly opposite to each other; and the dispositions, and efforts which are suited to the one are not suited to the other. If then, while we seem to be laboring for the spread of the gospel, we give a place in our

hearts to pride, ambition, or any selfish affection, we throw an obstacle directly in the way of our success in promoting that benevolent object. This is true, even where the sinful affections we indulge do not make themselves visible by any irregular conduct. If, when we retire for secret devotion, or kneel around our family altars,—if, when we meet in the sanctuary, or at the monthly concert, there should be in our hearts a predominance of worldly affections;—especially, if we should bring these affections with us, when we engage in more public and more important transactions relative to the interests of Christ's kingdom;—such a state of mind would prove a mighty clog to the cause of benevolence. With the outward man we might indeed be laboring to advance that cause; but the inward man would be a hinderance in the way;—a hinderance invisible, perhaps, to man, but none the less real. Indeed such a secret, invisible counteraction is attended with peculiar danger. It is a concealed enemy, whose power cannot be successfully opposed, because it cannot be seen. When, therefore, the cause in which we are enlisted is at a stand, and our various missionary operations are attended with no encouraging success; it will become us to enquire very seriously, whether this may not be owing, in a great measure, to some unholy passion which finds indulgence in our hearts, and which, like the sin of Achan, provokes the displeasure of a holy, heart-searching God.

But the operation of these counteracting causes is not always concealed. If worldly and selfish passions prevail in any considerable degree, they will have a *visible* influence. And we may be somewhat aided in getting a just conception of what this influence will be, and also of the opposite influence, by taking a comparative view of two public bodies of men, one of which is influenced by right motives, the other by those which are worldly and selfish.

Look then, first, into an assembly of ministers and Christians, who have come together to consult for the salvation of their fellow-men, and who are influenced in all their deliberations by holy affections. Delightful, happy assembly! Their object is one. Their hearts are one. They are knit together in pure and fervent love. They consult, not for their own interest or honor, but for the cause of Christ; and they do it in the spirit of Christ. Each one contributes to that cause all the intelligence and all the active power which he possesses. Each one is gratified with all the talents and influence which belong to his brethren, for the same reason that he is gratified with his own. And if others are able, by their *superior* talents and influence, to contribute more than he to that object which is dearest to his heart, the more is he gratified.—No one expends his zeal in favor of any measure because he was the first to propose it. And no one has such confidence in himself as to suppose that a measure must be right because it originated with him. No one is pertinacious, or self-willed. The wisdom which reigns among them "is from above; and is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy." In such an assembly, all is candor and kindness. The inquiry is, what will please Christ? What will promote the prosperity of his kingdom? If on any subject the members for a time differ in judgment, they still agree in feeling; and in the end are likely to agree in judgment too; so that important measures are not commonly carried either by a small or a large majority, but with perfect unanimity. Thus pursuing their object with Christian love and condescension, and singleness of heart, and with earnest prayer for Divine guidance, they enjoy the presence and favor of 'Gpd. He graciously superintends their deliberations, and gives them success in promoting the Redeemer's kingdom.

Look now at an assembly professedly engaged in promoting the same cause,

but among whom a selfish, earthly spirit prevails. A regard to reputation, or some worldly policy, may perhaps preserve them from open disorder and violence, and induce them to pursue such a course as will render their assembly respectable and honorable. But when their business is specially important, and when circumstances are such as to try men's souls, and to require special effort and self-denial; they are likely soon to show what their ruling passions are. Being without any common affection to unite them, they will have division and strife. Individuals will strenuously oppose a measure, though altogether salutary in its tendency, because it is not calculated to gratify their personal feelings, or to promote their private or local interests. It is manifest from their transactions, that they have lost sight of the great object of Christian benevolence. And as they do not truly consult for the prosperity of the Redeemer's kingdom, their measures are not suited to promote it. And if the cause of Christ is in any measure advanced, yea, if it is not essentially injured, it will be owing to that sovereign providence of God which brings good out of evil.

The same selfish spirit which has such a blasting influence upon ministers and Christians in their public transactions will show itself also in their private life, and will hold them back from those labors, and sacrifices, and prayers which are the appointed means of extending the reign of Christ. Men will act according to their ruling passion. If the love of any worldly object predominates, their thoughts and efforts will be directed to that object. As to the measures which ardent, devoted Christians are pursuing for the salvation of men,—they will look upon them with coldness or aversion. Now what influence can such men be supposed to have in promoting the salvation of the world?

Thirdly. The advancement of Christ's kingdom is essentially hindered by *division and strife among his followers.*

The cause of missions must be promoted by the *united* exertions of ministers and Christians. The good actually accomplished must be the result of such exertions. If then any disunion prevails among those who are enlisted in that cause, the amount of good they will be able to accomplish will certainly be diminished. The injury which division occasions is *twofold*. First, it detracts from the benevolent efforts of the individuals concerned. Though the subject about which they disagree may be ever so unimportant, it is likely to occupy no inconsiderable portion of their thoughts, and to turn off their attention from the cause of Christ, which is the great end of their united efforts. In consequence of this, each one will have less affection for that cause than he otherwise would have, and will do less to promote it.

Besides this, there is a *clashing of influence*. The efforts actually made for the cause of Christ by one part will be more or less resisted, and their good effect prevented by the counter efforts of another part. Just as it is with an army, divided and contending among themselves. The different portions of it, instead of making a united assault upon the common enemy, are broken and exhausted by annoying each other; and the few efforts they may make to gain a victory over the enemy are rendered powerless by division and counter movements among themselves.

As the want of a cordial union among ministers and Christians is such a hinderance to the spread of the gospel; how great is the evil of whatever tends to produce division. By indulging such feelings or pursuing such measures as have this tendency, by unscriptural novelties in doctrine, by abstruse or eccentric speculations, or by any such disputes as are likely to gender strife among the friends of evangelical religion, we may throw an obstacle in the way of the success of the gospel, which our most painful efforts will not be able to

remove, and which will be a subject of deep regret to us through the remainder of our life.

Fourthly. We may hinder the cause of missions by the unnecessary excitement of popular prejudice.

The missionary enterprise must fail of success, without the cordial affection and support of the Christian community. It essentially needs the aid of their efforts, contributions, and prayers. Now if those who are intrusted with the sacred interests of missions, are chargeable with any misconduct or any manifest indiscretion, such misconduct or indiscretion, proclaimed, as it will be, in the ears of the public, may cool the affections, excite the prejudices, and prevent the contributions and prayers of thousands. In this way, our power to do good may be greatly diminished, and a lasting injury be done to the cause which we are striving to promote.

Fifthly. We hinder the spread of the gospel, so far as we fall short in our duty in regard to the benevolent use of property.

Just in proportion to the magnitude and excellence of the object, should be our liberality in contributing of our substance for its promotion. It is the dictate of sound judgment, as well as of piety, that we should use our worldly property in such a manner as will afford us the greatest pleasure in our future reflections. Now let any Christian consider how he will view this subject, after the delusions of the present world shall have passed away, and the light of heaven shall reveal things as they are. Let him inquire with himself;—*Will it be most pleasing to me in the mansions of the blessed, to remember that I devoted this particular sum, be it larger or smaller, to the cause of Christ in heathen lands, or to remember that I used it for the purpose of self-gratification, or the aggrandisement of my family? Shall I have the greatest pleasure then in reflecting, that such an amount of property was made the means of advancing the kingdom of Christ, or the means of increasing the wealth of my heirs?*

Brother, suffer me to speak freely. The Christian community has of late years been waking up, in a measure, to better views in regard to the proper value and use of money; and many examples have been exhibited of a very honorable liberality in contributing to benevolent objects. But is not the prevailing practical sentiment still very far below the right standard? Can it be that men of wealth make the cause of Christ their *great object*, when they generally give to it so small a proportion of their substance? They love religion, no doubt, and wish to communicate its precious blessings to those who are ready to perish; and with a view to this object they contribute from year to year, and contribute liberally too in comparison with the generality of those around them; and then make legacies to some charitable societies. For these acts of Christian love we sincerely honor their memories; and we thank God who gave them the ability and the disposition to do good. But after all, what is the real amount of their charities, compared with the whole of their property? In a few instances, after a comfortable provision for their families, they devote the residue of their estate, which is the greater part, to the service of God. This is as it should be. But how is it generally with them that are rich? Have we not often occasion, after they are gone, to regret their mistakes, and to mourn that they did not entertain such views of the value of wealth while in this world as we are sure they must in the world above? After the decease of one good man and another, are we not constrained to say,—*How happy would it be, had they, while here, anticipated the feelings they now have as to the right use of their property, and had their contributions and legacies done full justice to their own hearts, and made it manifest, not only that they loved the cause*

of Christ, but that they loved it SUPREME. — Alas ! it is evident that ministers and Christians generally need stronger faith, more deadness to the world, and a clearer view of eternal things. They are not as spiritually-minded as they ought to be. They have not fully emerged from the darkness of a worldly life. In this state, do they not look at their property chiefly as the means of pleasing themselves, and promoting worldly objects ? And if they use it in some measure for the interest of Christ's kingdom, is it not still manifest that they make that no more than a secondary object ? Now, whether we have more or less of worldly substance, if we entertain mistaken or inadequate views of our duty respecting the use of it, and fall short of the high standard of self-denial and benevolent action set before us in the word of God ; if we give one dollar when we should give ten, or ten when we should give a hundred, a thousand, or ten thousand ; — this deficiency will be sinful in the sight of God, and will directly hinder the success of the missionary cause. This is one of the great hinderances which now stand in the way of the propagation of Christianity. Ah ! brethren, there are better times approaching. Generations of Christians will ere long rise up in the different walks of life, who will remember that the earth is the Lord's and the fulness thereof, and that the silver and the gold are to be devoted to his service. The time, we trust, is not far distant, when the church and its ministers will have higher views of duty, more self-denial, more simplicity in their modes of living, more devotion to that blessed cause for which the Son of God became poor. And those better ministers and churches will look back upon us in this our season of twilight and heaviness, and will wonder that we did so little for so great an object ; and that the work of evangelizing the world was carried forward so slowly in our day. Through the mercy of God, there is to be a visible growth of Christian character. Our children and children's children will, we doubt not, rise far above the highest zeal and devotion of the present time ; will be heartily grieved at the remembrance of our deficiencies, and will say among themselves ; — *We honor the memory of our fathers, who lived in the former part of the nineteenth century. We bless God that they had such a measure of zeal for the spread of the gospel and began to labor and pray in earnest for the salvation of the heathen. But it is truly a matter of regret, that they had so imperfect a view of their obligations in regard to the use of their property, and that they contributed so little to the march of Christianity through the world.*

The only remaining obstacle to the spread of the gospel which I shall mention is, *the want of a proper feeling and acknowledgment of our dependence on God for the success of our efforts.*

There is nothing which stands in more direct opposition to the truth than the spirit of pride and self-dependence. For whatever importance we may attach to our own efforts in the work of evangelizing the world, and whatever good we may expect from the faithful labors of missionaries, yet all success comes from God. The gospel, which is to be preached among the heathen, does indeed contain the most interesting truths, and urge the most powerful motives. But such is the moral state of man, that the preaching of it, even by the most faithful ministers, will be, as it always has been, utterly in vain, unless it is made effectual by the power of the Holy Spirit. The word of God teaches, and universal experience teaches the same, that the unrenewed heart is enmity against God ; that it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be. There is in man a loftiness of spirit, a love of the world, a selfishness which pertinaciously resists the influence of divine truth and all the attractions of divine love. So that the gospel, both in Christian and pagan lands, will be preached in vain, unless this resistance in the hearts of

men is effectually subdued. But it is too strong to be subdued by any power short of Omnipotence. In the most favorable circumstances, therefore, nothing can be effectually done to bring men into the kingdom of Christ, except by the special operation of God. And we depend equally upon the divine blessing for the success of those measures which we adopt as preparatory to the extension of the church. The efforts we make to stir up the people of our country to compassionate those who are in moral darkness, and to contribute of their substance to the salvation of the world; and all our efforts to train up young men for the missionary service, and to send them forth to different fields of labor, will entirely fail of their effect, unless they are accompanied with the divine influence. As friends to the heathen world, we are engaged in a benevolent, holy work. The unrenewed heart is against us. The spirit of the world is against us. The remaining ambition and selfishness of good men is against us. The whole current of earthly interests and pursuits is against us. These hostile powers, which form such a mighty combination both without the church and within it, are unceasing in their opposition. They never sleep. They are always watching for opportunities to obstruct the progress of the Christian religion. And even when we seem to be the most prosperous, and when the prospect before us is the most bright and animating, and we may begin to congratulate ourselves as though the victory were won,—we may soon find that there has been some counter current beneath—some malignant cause working and gaining strength in secret; and this malignant cause, thus concealing itself till it becomes powerful, may mix itself with the self-interest, the passions, and the prejudices of the irreligious, and with all that is earthly in the pious, and so a torrent of dreadful force may be formed, which will scorn all restraint, and be ready to overwhelm us and our cause. The hostile powers of which I now speak meet us every where. Whatever measures we adopt for the enlargement of Christ's kingdom, in our own or in foreign lands, we must look for resistance from the thousand forms of depravity existing in the world, in the church, and in our own hearts; resistance so subtle and determined, as not only to check our success, but entirely to dishearten us, and to constrain us to abandon our object, unless God interpose to strengthen us, and to turn back the power of the enemy.

Now, as we are thus encompassed with dangers,—as we are so feeble and imperfect ourselves, and are laboring to promote the spiritual kingdom of Christ in a world where self-interest, and pride, and numberless other forms of sin are constantly arrayed against us,—and as the unsanctified hearts of men are every where full of unyielding opposition to the holiness of Christianity,—we ought ever to remember and to feel that our success depends ultimately on the mercy and power of God. If we do not feel this; if we do not remember that we are nothing, and that God is all in all; if we rely upon the wisdom of our measures, upon the strength of our arguments, or the persuasiveness of our eloquence, or even upon our prayers, and forget Him, whose Spirit prompts all wise counsels and all holy endeavors, and whose blessing alone renders human efforts effectual; we place ourselves in opposition to the truth, we rob God of his glory, and make ourselves an offence and an abomination in his sight; and so we cut ourselves off from that divine blessing on which our success absolutely depends. For how can we expect that he will give us success in such a way as will minister to our pride? If we bring into our transactions for the promotion of Christ's kingdom a spirit of self-dependence, we create an obstacle to the progress of our cause; we set against our prayers, and bring a blast upon our labors.

Beloved brethren of this Board, and all friends of the missionary cause.— The great object for which we are unitedly laboring is, the establishment of Christ's kingdom in heathen lands. This is the object for which the Savior submitted to suffering and death. This is the cause which the prayers and labors of the saints and the ministration of angels are intended to subserve. It is the cause, to the promotion and ultimate triumph of which God is directing all the movements of his providence. With such labors and prayers on earth, and such powers and operations in heaven in its favor, we should think this glorious cause must make rapid advances. And it certainly would make rapid advances, and would speedily triumph in every part of the world, were it not for the many and mighty obstacles which resist its course. These obstacles, so far as they arise from ourselves, we have now taken into serious consideration. We have seen that those who are engaged in promoting the kingdom of Christ may obstruct its progress by the want of higher degrees of holiness; by the indulgence of selfish and earthly passions; by division and strife among themselves; by unnecessarily exciting popular prejudices; by falling short of duty in regard to their worldly substance; and by the want of a proper feeling and acknowledgment of their dependence on God for the success of their efforts. If then we would effectually advance the reign of Christ, we must take care not to put any of these hinderances in its way, nor to leave them there. We must rise above that low and defective state of piety which tends to obstruct our success; and by higher attainments in holiness, prepare ourselves to be better instruments, and to exert a higher and better agency in extending Christ's kingdom. We must oppose and subdue all selfish and earthly passions; as these passions, so far as they prevail, will array themselves against the benevolent spirit of the gospel, and will turn us off from our great work, to those interests which are private or local, and which ought never to be permitted, and which I trust never will be permitted by us, to come into competition with the interests of the Redeemer's kingdom. We must look upon division and strife among the friends of the missionary cause, as a great evil; and for the sake of preventing it, we must watchfully guard against all indiscretions, all rash and doubtful projects, all, in our modes of thinking and acting which would be needlessly offensive, all love of pre-eminence, and all aiming at personal or selfish objects. We must earnestly seek the wisdom which is from above, and endeavor to be followers of Him who was meek and lowly in heart. In pursuit of our object, we must form a just conception of the real value of property, and faithfully use it as a means of doing good. We must endeavor to have our wants few, and cultivate a taste for Christian simplicity. As to the objects of benevolence, our hearts should be large. We should make it our maxim to be sparing in self-gratification, but liberal in giving; to save what might please the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, that we may contribute more bountifully to the cause of our blessed Redeemer. And finally, in regard to the building up of the church, and the conversion of the world, we must remember that we are nothing, and that the blindness of man's understanding and the perverseness of his heart will baffle all our efforts, unless God is pleased to interpose, and accomplish the work by his own omnipotence. While we devote ourselves unreservedly to Christ, and make faithful exertions in his service, we must watchfully check every tendency in our minds to self-esteem and self-dependence, and rely wholly upon the grace of God to give us success. This renunciation of self-dependence, this deep sense of our insufficiency, and humble, childlike confidence in divine grace, is more pleasing to God, and will have more influence in advancing his kingdom, than the highest intellectual powers and the most

splendid actions without it. For God resisteth the proud, but bestows favor upon the humble.

We have now seen what are the obstacles on our part to the accomplishment of the great and excellent work we have undertaken. Let us only keep these obstacles out of the way, and the religion of the gospel will soon make more rapid progress. For the causes which operate in its favor under the administration of a benevolent God, are numerous and powerful. And, in my view, there never was a time when they were so numerous and powerful as they are now, or when the accomplishment of the great and precious promises in favor of the church was so manifestly approaching. If we and our fellow-laborers only keep in our place and do our work faithfully, and throw no hinderances in the way, the cause of our Redeemer in Christian and in heathen lands will prosper. Powers human, angelic, and divine are united in its favor, and will press it forward. All the perfections of Jehovah, all the principles of his merciful administration, all the truths of his word, the power of his Spirit, the glowing benevolence and swift obedience of myriads above, and all that is pure and holy in the affections and labors and prayers of Christians on earth, conspire together to bring forward the salvation of the world. See what a mighty influence these various causes are exerting! See what a bright prospect there is that things will soon be accomplished for the salvation of men, which prophets, apostles, martyrs, and reformers never saw! Behold the Son of God coming to inherit all nations! Oh! take care, brethren, not to cast any hinderance in his way. I charge you and myself not to clog the motion of any of these wheels of divine providence. If we have put a hinderance in the way, let us quickly remove it. And if any one finds *himself* a hinderance, let him remove himself. Better be an exile from creation than to stand in the way of God's work.

Finally: Let us never forget that it is owing to the grace of God that the cause of Christianity, with so many obstacles in its way, has made such progress in the world. Is it not rather a matter of wonder, that this light of the world has not been totally extinguished, than that it does not shine more brightly? I might have pointed you to the general perverseness and obduracy of man, the whole current of the world, and the powers of darkness, as obstacles to the progress of Christianity. But I have dwelt only upon our own deficiencies. We who profess to be friends to religion, and to act in its favor, how little have we done to promote it, and how much to hinder it! May not some of us have reason to fear that the cause of Christ has been more injured by our failings than benefited by our services? Oh! what would become of this precious cause if left in our hands, and if its success rested ultimately on our faithfulness? What would be the consequence if the salvation of men had no better security than our own efforts? Were all our affections devoted to it, and all our powers exerted in its behalf; still how feeble we are, and how little should we be able to accomplish! But have we devoted all our powers and affections to this holy cause? Has not the greater part of the time we possess been on the wrong side? And it becomes a very serious inquiry, whether, taking our whole character and life into view, the spiritual kingdom of Christ might not have been better without us than with us! Is it not a miracle of divine power, that religion maintains a place in the world, and is making any progress, when there is so much to oppose it even among its friends? For, go where we may, what Christians are there who do not mingle great imperfections with all they do in the service of Christ? Let it then be the abiding sentiment of our hearts, that the cause of religion cannot be trusted to man; that it is safe only in the hands of Him who is the author

and finisher of our faith; that whatever we may do, and whatever our missionaries may do, the heathen will never be enlightened except by the power of Him who first caused the light to shine out of darkness; that not a soul will ever be quickened and saved except by that sovereign energy which raises the dead. Let then the pride of man be abased; let every high thought be brought low, and let God alone be exalted.

SERMON CXIV.

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THE FOOLISH RICH MAN.

LUKE, xii. 16-20.—*The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, what shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, this will I do, I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*

By reading the context, we learn the object as well as the occasion of this parable. Our Lord, surrounded by a great multitude, was engaged in one of those solemn addresses, the tendency of which is to cause man to forget his connection with this world, and to fix his thoughts on the momentous concerns of the soul and eternity. But though the Divine teacher was thus employed, and though, perhaps, thousands around him were the subjects of the emotions his preaching was calculated to produce; yet there was one of the company whose heart remained wholly engrossed with the interests of this world; and who, regardless of all rules of propriety, said to our Lord, "Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me." To this ill-timed interruption our Lord replied, "Man! who made me a judge, or a divider over you?" Then turning to his audience, he said, "Take heed and beware of covetousness, for a man's life or happiness consisteth not in the abundance which he possesseth." This proposition our Lord proceeded to illustrate and support by the parable just read. It is not improbable that, though our text is introduced as a parable, yet it is strictly and truly a narrative of facts; and that our Lord could have stated both the name and the place of this man's abode. However, as this could not subserve any useful purpose, he simply states the facts in the form of a parable; which we will proceed to illustrate and apply.

The first thing which claims our notice is, *the worldly circumstances of the man mentioned in the parable—he was rich and prosperous.* "A certain rich man." The means by which he acquired his wealth are not particularly stated, and charity requires us to believe that his riches were attained by means just

and honorable. There are two statements in the parable from which we may infer that he had been distinguished for industry and economy. The first is, the productiveness of his lands; and the second, the address to his soul, "take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." The productiveness of his ground must have been the result of care and industry. And in the address to his soul, he seems to anticipate a course of ease and luxury to which he had not been accustomed. These statements warrant the conclusion, that industry and frugality were the sources of his riches.

Wealth is no mark of guilt, unless acquired by unlawful means. But, if a man become rich by injustice; by oppressing the poor; by defrauding the widow and fatherless; or by any abuse of divine bounty; then indeed his wealth is stained with guilt; and it has a voice which cries to Heaven for vengeance on the soul of its possessor. Let such hear the words of James, "Go to, now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you: your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten: your gold and silver is cankered, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped together treasure for the last days. Behold, the hire of the laborers, which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth; and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth."

Wealth is an object peculiarly fascinating, from the independence which it promises, and from the respect and honor which it often secures to its possessor. But if you feel the desire of it becoming inordinate, if the desire render you restless, if it inspire resolutions of being rich at all hazards, then hear the words of Paul; "They that will be rich," that are determined to be so at all events, "fall into temptation and a snare; and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition." This solemn caution, calmly considered, might prevent that "covetousness which is idolatry." But if your desire of wealth be suffered to grow and ripen into habitual covetousness, then is your condition hopeless indeed. Then the words of our Lord are applicable: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God."

But the man in the parable was not only rich, but also prosperous; *his grounds brought forth plentifully*. Hence we learn, that it is not possible to judge of a man's moral state from his circumstances and condition in this world. This is a truth which unassisted reason could never have discovered; she would conclude that the favored sons of fortune must be the objects of the divine approbation. But the parable under consideration shows conclusively that the fact may be otherwise: and the same sentiment is uttered by the wise man, "No man knoweth either love or hatred, by all that is done before them. All things come alike to all: there is one event to the righteous and to the wicked; to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth and to him that sacrificeth not."

The increasing wealth of this rich man was *a source of perplexity to him*. "He thought within himself, What shall I do? I have no room where to bestow my fruits." As he who increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow, so he who increaseth his worldly substance procures for himself additional cares and perplexities. Indeed, the rich cannot render their wealth productive without trusting its management to others: and here their cares and anxieties begin. "What shall I do?" Where is the man that I can trust? Where, and how will my property be secure, and most productive? These, and similar inquiries occupy their minds, and distract their hearts. And where

trusts are reposed, a thousand fears and alarming suspicions arise. This department must be seen to; and that agency must be watched; and in this way the unhappy possessor is kept in a state of perpetual solicitude. To all this must be added disappointed hopes and blasted prospects, arising from unfavorable seasons, wasting commerce, unfortunate debtors, designing knaves, and a thousand adverse circumstances. These cares and disappointments multiply upon the unhappy possessor of wealth; they drive sleep from his eyes, and often extort the melancholy exclamation, "What shall I do?" Let the industrious and virtuous poor, who enjoy a competency, survey this faint exhibition of wasting perplexity, and say whether they can envy the man of the world *the pleasure and ease of wealth*; let them look on it, and learn to thank Heaven for the peace and security of competency. "And having food and raiment, let them be therewith content."

There is one way in which this rich man might have relieved himself of his perplexity; that is, by "*giving to the poor*." Had he resolved on feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and honoring God by administering to the spiritual as well as temporal wants of his fellow men, he had been relieved from the cares of his superabundance, and his righteousness had been remembered with God: but unhappily his perplexities led to very different results. He resolved, "This will I do, I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods."

It is proper that the rich should deliberate on the best method of securing their increasing wealth. But at the same time let them remember the words of our Lord.—"Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations." In this way they might lay up for themselves treasure in heaven. The Scriptures teach that "he who giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord;" and that "he will repay it again." This, then, is the way to render estates secure and productive. Solomon says, "Honor the Lord with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase, so shall thy barns be filled with plenty." And the Prophet Isaiah adds, "The liberal deviseth liberal things; and by liberal things shall he stand." If we believe in the doctrine of divine Providence, we cannot hesitate to receive these sayings. We believe that our health, our capacity for business, our facilities for acquiring property, are all from God. Is it not, then, consistent with these principles that we consider ourselves as only *stewards* of the divine bounty?

The *objects* of this rich man's resolutions were his own personal ease, luxury, and pleasure. "I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine *ease, eat, drink, and be merry*." Whatever may have been his former character and course of life, he now appears determined on a life of ease and sensuality; he says to his soul, "*eat, drink, and be merry*." What a madman! How appropriate to him was the appellation of "*fool*!" He resolves to *quit* the course which had secured to him health and independence! He thinks to free his heart from anxiety and care by *eating, drinking, and making merry*! No wonder the God of wisdom should say, "THOU FOOL!" Can the fruits of the earth satisfy the immortal mind? What kind of earthly possessions, or what amount of them, can fill the desires, and set the soul at rest? Alas! every sublunary thing exclaims, "Satisfaction is not in me!" and all experience corroborates the testimony, "*Vanity of vanities; all is vanity*." How extremely wretched, then, is the condition of such as seek their portion in this life! What certain disappointment awaits those whose highest pleasure is found in the gratifications

of sense! The beasts of the field have greatly the advantage over most human sensualists: their powers of this kind are more ample, and their indulgences are not followed by such a train of frightful and afflictive maladies!

The course to which this rich man urges his soul is such as must inevitably terminate in the loss of all that is valuable on earth, as well as in heaven. Health, reputation, peace, and even life, will soon be lost to such as give themselves up to eating, drinking, and making merry. The life of the epicure must necessarily be short. He cannot retain credit with the sober and active portion of the community; his health cannot withstand his habits of excess; his property will waste like the snow before the vernal sun; and he will finally quit the scene of his luxury and pleasures unhonored and unlamented! Truly, "the pleasures of sin are but for a season."

The exercises, the joys, and the hopes of religion are the proper food of the soul: they are the pleasures of the rational mind. Here, to adopt the language of inspiration, here is, "a feast of fat things." The Christian has every way the advantage over the mere sensualist. It is his to enjoy the bounties of Providence. He makes the creatures of God to subserve his happiness, while he becomes the slave of none. He eats and drinks; but, using the things of this life as not abusing them, he defiles not the temple of God, but preserves it unto "sanctification and honor." And "blessed are the undefiled—who walk in the way of the Lord." But can the sensualist who has been born and educated in a Christian land be happy? Could he but see the relation which he sustains to God and eternity, he would turn pale, and would confess himself the most wretched and degraded of men!

From the conduct of this rich man we learn the fatal propensity of sinners to deceive themselves. He says, "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years." Yes, it is this insatiable hope of *many years* to come which renders thousands so improvident of present time and privileges, and so unmindful of future and eternal interests. Let them once apprehend that they are standing on the verge of death, and that a few hours will introduce them into the presence of their Judge; and they take the alarm, and instantly become all solicitude about the interests of the soul! The world is now a mere trifle, its pleasures and possessions lose all their charms. They stand ready to make any sacrifice, and to weep rivers of blood! They summon the ministers of the sanctuary; they call for the emblems of the broken body, and the shed blood of the neglected Savior; and their tongues become eloquent in the language of penitence. But why all this hurry of movement now? Alas! they discover the work of years before them; and but a few fleeting moments in which they can work! "O that men were wise, that they understood this; that they would consider their latter end."

Contemplate now the *sudden and unexpected end* of the wretched man in our text. While he was flattering himself with the prospect of *many years* of ease, pleasure, and enjoyment, God said unto him, "Thou fool! *this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*" This man appears to have wholly neglected God: his single object had been the attainment of riches; riches which he now purposes to spend in ease and luxury. But mark, on the very day he resolves to finish his toils, and to begin his pleasures;—on that very day God calls him to account! He promised himself many years: perhaps he felt no symptom of decay, nor infirmity of body; on the contrary, he possessed all the energy, and the flow of spirits naturally resulting from an active life. Surely if any man could promise himself many years of earthly happiness, he was the

man; but "God said unto him, *this night thy soul shall be required of thee.*" This must have been heavy tidings to a man who had busied himself in preparing for a long life of ease and happiness! And how terrible alas must have been the consternation excited in the bosoms of his relatives and friends! Medical talent and wisdom might have been summoned; but what could this avail when *the decree had gone forth?*

How uncertain at best is our stay on earth: how feeble is our hold on life! Our youth, our health, our condition in life, our place of residence avail us nothing: they promise no security against the shafts of death. The time, and place, and manner of our death are in the hands of God. Whenever He shall pronounce the decree, inexorable death will execute the sentence.

"*This night thy soul shall be required of thee.*" Death, under the most favorable circumstances, is a period of great solemnity. The hour, even to the good man, is a *trying hour*. What then must it be to the man who is taken by surprise? to him who has never thought of God, of heaven, of salvation, of death, and of eternity, but as objects at the greatest distance? Death, indeed, is an evil which might be endured, and to which we might submit, if there were not eternal considerations connected with it. Looking upon death as simple *extinction* of life and consciousness, we might perhaps assume confidence to meet it with composure. But when we consider it as an event which places the soul before Him who is of purer eye than to look on sin, and who can by no means clear the guilty; when we consider that it separates us *for ever* from all the means of grace and salvation; when we consider that "as the tree falls so it lies," then, indeed, death becomes a subject the most terrific and alarming to sinners; and this is the only correct view of the subject; for "after death is the judgment."

Let us now briefly advert to the *total loss* which the miserable man sustained when God summoned him out of life. God said, "Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" We see here his dreadful reverse of fortune. One moment he finds himself surrounded by every thing that can minister to his vanity and appetite; but the next he sees the whole departing from his grasp, receding from his view! One moment his heart swells with the pleasing consciousness that every thing is his; but the next his spirit sinks down with the painful assurance that every thing is *lost*! His toils are ended; but so likewise are his enjoyments! He takes one exulting view of his only means of happiness; but mark! God draws over him the curtains of death, saying, "*It is thy last!*"

"Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" Perhaps some worthless and ill-deserving heir stepped forth, seized the fruit of his labor, rioted on it for a season, and then dropped unprepared into eternity, to curse the unhappy wretch who had furnished him with the means of self-pollution and destruction.

Is this, then, the dreadful result? Do men toil and economize to lay up that of which they shall never themselves partake; and which may become the fatal source of crime and ruin to their thoughtless and improvident heirs! Then let the busy and active, who are led on only by the prospect of wealth and independence, consider well what they do. Let them anticipate the terrible consequences which may result from the affluence to which they aspire. We do not say that the calamities which befel this rich man were the natural result of his wealth. They resulted from his want of *piety*. Whether a man be rich or poor, if he be wanting in this, he will sustain a *total loss* in the

hour of death. Death will be to him the termination of joys, and the beginning of sorrows. In this matter there is no respect of persons with God; for "He will render to every man according to his works."

Finally. The men who seek their portion in this life, may learn from the history before us the vanity of all their expectations and dependence. "What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" This is a total and irretrievable loss! The life, the soul, *all* is lost, and *lost for ever*! Say not, then, "a little more sleep, a little more alumber, a little more folding of the hands to sleep." Alas! sinners, you have slept too long already; let sober reason now assume her throne; and let the word of God direct your future course. Heaven and hell are solemn realities, and there is but a step between you and your endless abode. A few more fleeting moments, and we either rise to the joys of heaven or sink to the miseries of hell! And if so,

"Nothing is worth a thought beneath,
But how we may escape that death
Which never, never dies;
How make our own election sure,
And when we fall on earth secure
A mansion in the skies."